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SUBJECT: The Political Situation in Haiti

Introduction:

The regime of Haitian president Magloire, who was popularly elected for a six-year term in October 1950, has long since developed into what may be considered a military dictatorship. Although the regime is in financial difficulty and there are reports of some dissatisfaction in the army, Magloire and his friends still appear firmly entrenched in power.

Magloire is constitutionally barred from running for the presidency in 1956, but he has recently indicated an intention to perpetuate himself as the real power in Haiti by making arrangements to assume the title of general in chief of the army at the end of his presidential term.

Political organization in Haiti

There are no true political parties in Haiti, and political prominence is based on personal popularity or influence. This fact is exemplified in the dearth of candidates reported in December for the 9 January elections for the 37-man Chamber of Deputies and for municipal posts.

The only known organized political opposition to the regime is the workers' and Peasants' Movement. It comprises the following of Deputy Daniel Fignole, reputed to be a leftist rabble-rouser and a long-standing irritant to the government. There has been no known Communist activity since dissolution of the "plebian" Haitian Communist Party in 1948 and of its "intellectual" counterpart, the Popular Socialist Party and certain front organizations in January 1951.

A small group of essentially moderate reformists, in which Fignole was included, established the League for the Defense of Public Liberties late in December 1953, but leaders of the league were accused of inciting revolution and arrested within two weeks. They had all been released by mid-April 1954 and have apparently not renewed their activity.

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### Magloire's rise to power

Magloire emerged as one of Haiti's strongest leaders in 1946, when as commandant of the palace guard he was largely instrumental in overthrowing the president who had sought to prolong his term. A military triumvirate composed of Magloire, then a major, Colonel Franck Lavaud, and Major Antoine Levelt ruled for a few months until the congress elected a new civilian president. Like his deposed predecessor, the new executive attempted in May 1950 to prolong himself in power. Lavaud, Levelt, and Magloire again assumed power. Popular elections were held on 8 October 1950, when Magloire was elected president and the present Senate and Chamber of Deputies were elected. A Constituent Assembly elected at the same time drafted the present constitution, which became effective on 28 November 1950.

### Consolidation of military rule and personal influence

There is good reason to believe that the 1950 elections were largely controlled by the triumvirate, though several opponents of Magloire were elected. Reflecting Magloire's domination, the constitution permitted military officers on inactive status to hold elective office. Apparently none but Magloire has done so. The constitution also provides for the reorganization of the army to place the police force of the capital under a separate military command. The rule of the military and thus enhanced, while the military establishment was divided.

The principal military officers, all classmates of Magloire, are considered personally loyal to him. Neither Levelt, now army chief of staff, nor Woolley, commandant of the palace guard, is believed politically ambitious. Colonel Marcaisse Prosper, commandant of the Port-au-Prince police, therefore usually figures in speculation on the presidential succession as virtually the only known serious aspirant. Prosper, however, who is a close business associate of Magloire has consistently exercised his power in favor of the regime, even during the president's three-week absence from the country last summer. Part of Prosper's influence derives from his role in the distribution of governmental graft. As a reputed champion of "black" supremacy in Haiti, he may have some support among elements opposed to Magloire's policy of conciliating "black's" and "mulattos," traditional political rivals.

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In any case, the police controlled by Prosper are not considered sufficiently well armed to threaten Magloire as long as he retains the support of the palace guard, Haiti's only well-equipped and cohesive military unit.

#### Problems confronting the regime

While the opposition to Magloire is nebulous, criticism of graft and corruption is mounting. There have been reports of dissatisfaction within the army since the 11 October hurricane, the reported cause being the diminution of government revenues due to the loss of export crops and the consequent cut in the take of Magloire's supporters.

It is now clear that the country was beset by financial difficulties even before the hurricane, in spite of an excellent export year. Originally financed by a surplus accumulated through years of rigidly conservative fiscal management, Magloire's development program launched in 1951 resulted in a large overdraft at the National Bank by 1953. Short-term loans from American banks and from American and other foreign contractors working on the projects maintained operations through the summer of 1954, and these loans were duly repaid out of taxes on coffee, Haiti's principal export. Haitian financial missions have been unsuccessful in obtaining long-term financing, however, and even the Artibonite Valley irrigation project, financed by the Export-Import Bank, is not in danger of running out of funds.

#### Effect of economic problems on political situation

Haitian officials have become increasingly critical of United States policies on hemisphere economic problems during 1954. The government is probably strongly tempted to make the United States a scapegoat for internal difficulties. Nevertheless it has recently expressed a desire to resume negotiations for a long-pending treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation, and Magloire hopes to sign such a treaty during his visit to Washington in January. Negotiations for a bilateral military assistance pact, requested by Haite earlier this year, are also scheduled to begin on 10 January. The traditionally friendly attitude of the Haitian government towards the United States will evidently be reaffirmed before Magloire's visit, primarily in the hope of gaining eventual American financial aid. Magloire appears to consider, however, that his immediate political difficulties will be alleviated merely by signing of the treaties.